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UNCLAS PARIS 07462

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INFO RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 1179
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FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

FOR IO/UNESCO
NAIROBI FOR OBSERVER

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: SCUL KPAO UNESCO
SUBJECT: UNESCO AND ITS RIGHT TO THE CITY PROGRAM

¶1. Summary. Despite concerns raised by the U.S. Mission, UNESCO continues to pursue its "Right to the City" program and will be holding a December 11-12 meeting on "Urban Policies and the Right to the City." Despite UNESCO's support of this program, it is clear from a recent meeting with the organizers, that its goals are fuzzy at best. At the same time, the fuzziness of these goals may present an opportunity to get away from an open-ended pursuit of ill-defined "rights" and for this program to be redirected and focused on civic education. End Summary.

¶2. DCM and HHS attache met November 20 with Wataru Iwamoto and Brigitte Colin of UNESCO's Social and Human Sciences (SHS) program and who have been the primary staff responsible for the "Right to the City" program. In previous meetings Mission had expressed its unhappiness with the profligate use of the term "rights" by UNESCO and SHS and the vagueness of the term "right to the city," in particular. Mission had also raised the unclear aim of this program. Though there will be a working group meeting at UNESCO December 11-12 on "Urban Policies and the Right to the City," Iwamoto, stressed he is aware of U.S. concerns and promised that the name of the program will soon be changed to remove the word rights. The new name will try to more accurately capture the nature of the program. Iwamoto also assured us that the outcome of this project would not lead to a normative instrument.

¶3. Unfortunately, judging from the conversation, the nature of the program is not clear, even to the UNESCO secretariat. They have lumped together a number of inchoate concepts such as access to water supplies, rights of women and dealing with immigration at the city level. Topics of sessions at the upcoming UNESCO meeting include: innovative practices in French speaking cities, Montreuil, France-policies for integrating immigrants, rights to the city for street traders and informal workers, the right to urban water, and so-on.

¶4. Attending the December meeting will be representatives from UNHABITAT and various universities and cities participating in a loose network that has already been established. Among the participants will be Mark Purcell of the Department of Urban Design and Planning at the University of Washington. Colin from SHS pointed out that they have been having a difficult time finding partners in developing countries that really may need help with urban management. For this reason, they are working through the already-established network of Francophone mayors sponsored by the Francophonie organization. HHS attache asked if there was a possibility of working with the Commonwealth.

¶5. When asked what other UNESCO sectors the program is working with, Iwamoto replied the Education Sector's Education for Sustainable Development program and the Science Sector's water education program. Iwamoto appeared open to a suggestion from the DCM that the program be more focused on the basics of democracy and civic education. Iwamoto agreed with a suggestion by the DCM that he meet with the chief of the education sector's division responsible for civic education and that he also meet with the Communications and Information sector to see how they could be involved in this program.

¶6. Mission reps also offered to look for partners that could be involved in getting the program better focused on grassroots democracy and practical solutions to urban problems. Among the organizations suggested was Sister Cities International, an organization that Iwamoto and Colin knew nothing about. A name that also arose was that of Shannon H. Sorzano, Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Affairs at the U.S. Department of

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Housing and Urban Development. Sorzano was a panelist at the World Urban Forum in Vancouver, Canada this past May. (Comment: IO/UNESCO may want to reach out to Sorzano to coordinate policy in this field.) USAID is also doing work in this area and might have ideas for partners and resources.

¶6. Comment. While we received a positive response to our proposal to focus the program more on civic education, we are still a long way from realizing that goal. It will probably take months of prodding and pushing to turn the "Right to the City" into a program that produces tangible outcomes rather than a lot of fragmented discussion.

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